Stone Assessment Steart Village 77221

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- The small sized assemblage of worked and un-worked stone recovered from Steart Village is dominated by local available materials either brought in by Longshore Drift from outcrops to the west (Devonian sandstones) or acquired from local Lower Jurassic outcrops (Blue, White Lias – Paper shale). Occasional fragments of Quartzite and granite have been brought in from further afield. (See catalogue)

- A large proportion of the assemblage consists of marine shaped pebbles brought in from the local fine brown sandstones (Hangman Grits) by longshore drift.

- Two of these pebbles [20211] [21017] have been fashioned for use as rubstones – thus utilising beach deposits for use.

- One fashioned whetstone from Roman layer [20211] is an "exotic" in that it is a hard dark green/grey sandstone that is comparable to Pennant sandstone from the Upper Carboniferous from the Bristol/Forest of Dean area. This rock was used for this purpose at Silchester and London.

- The quartz conglomerate from Roman level [20202] and evaluation [2412] has inclusions of Devonian sandstone in it. This and the fact that the quartz is fractured – is a sure indication of an older Palaeozoic age. It does not, however, resemble the basal quartz conglomerate from the Devonian of the Forest of Dean as this has very large fractured quartz pebbles in it. This example is grittier and may well represent more locally acquired conglomerate (Hodders Combe Beds) from the Hangmans Grits (Whitaker & Green 1983, 4). It is also not comparable with the Triassic Dolomitic Conglomerate from Bristol (Kellaway & Welch 1993, 136)

- One other material not local to the area is a loosely compacted red Triassic sandstone from Roman context as a possible weight [20238] but also a rubble fragment from [21409] and a fragment from comparable with examples from the Redcliffe Sandstone Formation of Bristol (Kellaway & Welch 1993, 131). This is not a rock normally associated with Roman use, but would have been easily acquired from outcrops along the banks of the Avon.

- Roofing material consists of a range of materials including the locally available fissile White and Blue Lias (specific to the Roman building), Hangman Grits and a solitary example of a slate (probably Lynton Slate) associated with the medieval/post medieval phases of activity [21409].

- The use of Lias material for Roman building (roofing, paving, tessarae) is prominent throughout Somerset including the villa at Yarford near Taunton (Hayward pers. obs.). The site at Steart, however, does not include the green metaslates (Morte Slates) so characteristic of the roofing assemblage at Yarford.

Conclusion

This moderate sized assemblage (60 examples 34.8kg) is dominated by locally available Liassic and Devonian material both for Roman and medieval/post medieval occupation. Where stone has been put to a specific use, however, (e.g. whetstone, weight, quernstone?) , especially in Roman levels the rock has come from slightly further afield - the Carboniferous and Triassic deposits of Avon [20238] [20211]. The accessibility of the Avon and the Severn Estuary were no doubt a major factor in the supply of portable objects to coastal sites along the Bristol Channel.

Given the absence, however, of bulky freestone materials from the Cotswold ridge (Bath oolite; Painswick stone; Dundry stone), which were used at Roman sites throughout the Severn Estuary area (Bath; Caerleon; Sea Mills) it is likely that there was not a great deal of prestige/status attached to the site at Steart.

Bibliography

Maps 1:50,000 Geological Maps 279 (Weston-Super-Mare) and 264 (Bristol).

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Whittaker, A. & Green, G.W. (1983). The geology of the country around Weston-super-Mare. *Memoir of the Geological Survey of Great Britain*. Sheet 279 with parts of 263 and 295. 147pp.